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**SOCIETAL CONSTRUCTS OF GENDER  
IDENTITY AND RESISTANCE IN MALALA  
YOUSAFZAI'S *I AM MALALA***

# ABSTRACT

Elina Salovuori: Societal Constructs of Gender Identity and Resistance in Malala Yousafzai's *I Am Malala*  
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This thesis is an analysis of Malala Yousafzai's autobiography *I Am Malala*. The aim of the thesis is to examine how the societal constructs present in the conservative Pakistani and Islamic culture of Yousafzai's village affect her gender identity, both consciously and subconsciously, and how Yousafzai resists these influences. Her resistance against the societal constructs is tied together with the act of writing an autobiography and resisting the male-dominated literary canon.

The theoretical framework of the analysis is feminist literary criticism. The thesis focuses on previous studies of female autobiographies as well as gynocriticism. The theoretical sources are used to present how Yousafzai's resistance to the societal constructs, the rules and stereotypical roles placed on women in her village, is mirrored by writing an autobiography and stepping into the public sphere that has traditionally been a space for men. The act of writing an autobiography resists the tradition of women's silence and makes her resistance public.

The analysis shows how Yousafzai resists the societal constructs of her society but at the same time is influenced by them. She forms her own independent view of women, but her gender identity is still inevitably influenced by the culture she lives in. Yousafzai's adoration towards her father demonstrates how the culture affects her subconsciously. The thesis concludes that Yousafzai uses the genre of autobiography as a tool of resistance, to show that she is not a passive victim but a woman with an agency. This way Yousafzai gains a public voice for her campaign for education and refuses to be silenced by the Taliban.

Keywords: Female Autobiography, Feminist Literary Criticism, Gynocriticism, Gender Identity, Societal Constructs, Resistance

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# TIIVISTELMÄ

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Tämä tutkimus on analyysi Malala Yousafzain omaelämäkerrasta *Minä olen Malala*. Tutkimuksen tavoitteena on tarkastella miten Yousafzain kotikylän konservatiivisen pakistanilaisen ja islamilaisen kulttuurin sosiaaliset rakenteet vaikuttavat hänen sukupuoli-identiteettiinsä, sekä tietoisesti että alitajuisesti, ja miten Yousafzai vastustaa näitä vaikutuksia. Hänen vastustamisensa liitetään omaelämäkerran kirjoittamiseen ja siihen liittyvän miesvaltaisen kirjallisuuskannonin vastustamiseen.

Tutkimuksen teoreettisena viitekehysenä toimii feministinen kirjallisuudentutkimus. Tutkimus keskittyy gynokritiikkiin ja aikaisemmin tehtyihin naisten omaelämäkertatutkimuksiin. Teoreettisia lähteitä käytetään osoittamaan Yousafzain vastustamista kylänsä sosiaalisia rakenteita, naisia koskevia sääntöjä ja stereotyyppioita kohtaan, jotka heijastuvat omaelämäkerran kirjoittamiseen. Yousafzain yhteiskunnassa vallitsee selkeä sukupuolien välinen epätasa-arvo ja naisten perinteiseen rooliin kuuluu purdah, jolla tarkoitetaan naisten eristyisyyttä. Tämän takia Yousafzain kylässä on selkeä ero naisten yksityisen ja miesten julkisen aseman välillä. Yousafzai nousee omaelämäkerran kirjoittamisen myötä osaksi julkista yhteiskuntaa, joka on perinteisesti ollut miesten aluetta. Kirjoittamalla omaelämäkerran Yousafzai vastustaa naisten vaihtelun perinnettä ja muuttaa vastustamisensa julkiseksi.

Yousafzai vastustaa yhteiskuntansa sosiaalisia rakenteita. Analyysi kuitenkin osoittaa, että vastustamisesta huolimatta nämä rakenteet myös vaikuttavat häneen. Vaikka Yousafzai muodostaakin itsenäisesti oman naiskuvansa, ympäröivä kulttuuri vaikuttaa silti väistämättä hänen sukupuoli-identiteettiinsä. Yousafzain isäänsä kohtaan tuntema ihailu toimii esimerkkinä kulttuurin alitajuisista vaikutuksista. Näin analyysi osoittaa, että sosiaaliset rakenteet ovat hyvin monimutkaisia, eikä niiden vaikutuksia pysty koskaan kokonaan välttämään. Yousafzai kuitenkin näyttää miten näitä rakenteita voidaan vastustaa koulutuksen antaman tietämyksen avulla. Tutkimuksen perusteella voidaan päätellä, että Yousafzai hyödyntää omaelämäkertaa sosiaalisten rakenteiden vastustamiseen, näyttääkseen, ettei hän ole passiivinen uhri vaan nainen, joka toimii aktiivisesti ja itsenäisesti. Näin Yousafzai saa myös julkisen äänen koulutuskampanjalleen ja kieltäytyy vaimenemasta, Talibanista huolimatta.

Avainsanat: naisen omaelämäkerta, feministinen kirjallisuudentutkimus, gynokritiikki, sukupuoli-identiteetti, sosiaaliset rakenteet, vastustaminen

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# 1. Introduction

This bachelor thesis will focus on *I Am Malala*, the autobiography of Malala Yousafzai which is co-written with Christina Lamb. The thesis will examine how the societal constructs present in conservative Islamic and Pakistani cultures influence Malala Yousafzai's gender identity and how she resists these influences by forming her own independent view of herself and women. I will apply feminist literary theory and gynocriticism in my analysis. Additionally, this thesis will focus on previous studies on female autobiographies.

This topic is relevant because, even though women's position has improved throughout history, there are still large areas and many countries where women are severely oppressed, even today. Yousafzai is a young girl from rural Pakistan, a small village called Swat, where a widespread cultural phenomenon is that women are secluded from men and taught to stay out of the public life (Papanek 519). This forceful culture affects the forming of her identity during her childhood. Yousafzai acknowledges most of these influences, but they also have subconscious effects, most evidently how she defines herself and her opinions via her father. However, Yousafzai frequently questions and criticizes the rules placed on women in her village and interprets the Quran independently from traditional views.

Yousafzai actively resists the traditional role of a woman from Swat and one crucial aspect of her resistance is in writing an autobiography. Similarly, to how many women in Swat are forced to stay out of the public sphere, women have been excluded from the male-dominated canon of autobiographies. Sidonie Smith explores how a female autobiography resists the tradition of women's silence: "In history's scheme the good woman is defined by her absence. She does not assert herself in public speech, nor is she talked about by others ... women's sphere is out of sight and sound" (Long 27). Consequently, in writing an autobiography of her life, Yousafzai steps further into

the public sphere and asserts that her life is exceptional and should be read about. In effect this is another powerful act of resistance.

## 2. Theory

Female autobiographies have been studied from various analytical perspectives. Considering Yousafzai's autobiography, feminist literary theory and gynocriticism are relevant theoretical approaches. From the feminist point of view, female autobiographies are studied in view of female subjectivity and the binary oppositions with male-dominated canon. Autobiography, and literature in general, reflect societal structures. Patriarchal societies have traditionally placed men in the public sphere and women in the private sphere. (Oldfield 9-10) These binary oppositions are evident in Yousafzai's village and are an essential part of the societal constructs in place to control women. This is mirrored by literary canon: "the canon, its gatekeepers and the related control of publication ... act as filters for inclusion and exclusion ... [the] concentration of male subjects and male critics gives a masculine cast to the canon of autobiography" (Long 16-17). The societal constructs on women's place in society have consequently affected women authors. Regarding the genre of autobiographies this is especially evident, because "[w]hen the female subject defines herself she overruns the restriction of women to private life and private space. The public authority of autobiography means claiming a new space for the female subject. Writing her autobiography positions the female self in the public sphere, in history" (Long 43). The female autobiographer must step into the public sphere and obtain characteristics traditionally controlled by men.

The decision to write and publish an autobiography of one's own life is underlined by the belief that one's life should be read about. This belief and confidence contradict the attributes traditionally placed on women. Judy Long addresses this contradiction in her book *Telling Women's Lives*: "Women's self-writing is animated by the tension between external control of women and the assertion of female subjectivity ... Women subjects are at risk because the requirements of autobiography and the requirements of femininity are at odds ... Autobiography is self-display, opposed to the female virtues of modesty and concealment" (Long 27). This argument connects to Yousafzai's autobiography, because the traditional role of a woman in her society is to be in purdah.

Purdah is a concept that is extremely difficult to define or make any broad generalizations about. Its implementation varies depending on “place of residence”, culture, religious beliefs, “level of education” and “individual life circumstances ... The definition of a “purdah society”, however is based on the presence of the institution of female seclusion as an important aspect of the society” (Papanek 519). Additionally, “a crucial characteristic of purdah ... is the limitation of interaction between women and males outside certain well-defined categories” (Papanek 519). The seclusion of women is accomplished by women wearing a veil called burqa and secluding women to their own private spaces, which are separate from men’s. However, it is important to note that women may disregard purdah in different ways and purdah is a concept that varies individually. (Papanek 519) Thus, by writing an autobiography Yousafzai actively resists this role placed on women by societal constructs, by stepping into the public sphere and putting her private life on display.

Gynocriticism is a feminist literary theory that focuses specifically on women authors and analyses texts written by women from a gendered perspective. Additionally, it has a focus on literary canon and the tradition of female exclusion. Therefore, it offers a justification for analysing Yousafzai’s autobiography in terms of her gender. Susan Stanford Friedman observed “[g]ynocriticism[‘s] ... emphasis on sexual difference and a privileging of gender as constituent of identity. For gynocriticism the existence of patriarchy, however changing and historically inflected, serves as the founding justification for treating women writers of different times and places as part of a common tradition based on gender” (2). Yousafzai’s gender is immensely relevant to the analysis of her autobiography, because of the subject matter of the book; how it describes Swat’s society and women’s lives and place in it. The plot reflects the development of Yousafzai’s own gender identity in her environment throughout her childhood, thus gynocriticism is an inevitable part of its analysis. Additionally, with the genre of female autobiography, analysis in terms of gender is always pertinent.

By making her autobiography, Yousafzai gains a position of power that she has long lacked in her society. She has the power to tell her story in her own terms and make her voice heard.



This is reflected by Yousafzai's dedication at the beginning of the book: "To all the girls who have faced injustice and been silenced. Together we will be heard". She identifies herself with other girls, with experiences similar to hers and leads by example. Yousafzai takes away the power of her adversaries, who wanted to silence her, by gaining an even louder platform to advocate for women's rights and education. This is an act of resistance that she wishes other girls like her will follow. Shafag Dadashova reflects on this power shift in her article "Power and Representation in Women's Autobiographies": "(...) Autobiographies are [their authors'] revolt against the conventional norms, their decision to have an agency to confess and protest ... attempts to break the established matrix of perceptions, imposed norms, and gain power to build the real picture of their identity". Yousafzai gains an agency, in contrast to the women's passivity enforced by the Taliban. Thus, she achieves "empowerment through self-analysis" (Dadashova).

### **3. Analysis**

The analysis focuses on three different aspects of Yousafzai's autobiography. The first section describes the societal constructs in Yousafzai's village and their effects on her gender identity. The second section focuses on the societal structures' subconscious effects on Yousafzai's gender identity and the final section details different aspects of her resistance.

#### **3.1 Societal constructs and their effects on gender identity**

In her autobiography, Yousafzai describes growing up in a small Pakistani village, called Swat. She describes how the societal constructs present in the local culture affected the women and girls' gender identities. The widespread cultural values and norms in Swat contributed to the society's gender-inequality and the Islamic tradition of women's purdah, seclusion, was taken very seriously by most citizens. Yousafzai begins describing the inequalities present in the society, from the moment of her birth: "I was a girl in a land where rifles are fired in celebration of a son, while daughters are hidden away behind a curtain, their role in life simply to prepare food and give birth to children. For most Pashtuns it's a gloomy day when a daughter is born" (9).

There were many societal norms in place in Swat, that restricted Yousafzai's life from very early on, simply because she was a girl. In the eyes of the traditional culture, women were lesser in station than male children: "My mother and I could not go out without a male relative to accompany us, even if it was a five-year-old boy! This was the tradition" (Yousafzai 20). Additionally, even Yousafzai's father's school followed some traditions that maintained the men's power over women, even though they wanted to provide education for women. Yousafzai participated in a public speaking competition at her school and her speech was written by her father, because "in [the local] culture speeches are usually written by ... fathers, uncles or teachers" (63). This is another aspect of the societal constructs that are in place to control women. In a public speaking competition, the girl steps into the public sphere, which is rarely, if at all acceptable, because of the purdah, where women

should be out of sight and concealed from men. However, the tradition of the men writing the speeches shows that even when the women are allowed to step into the public sphere, the societal constructs force them to do so in terms dictated by men. They are given a platform to give voice to the men's message, not their own. Yousafzai learns from the experience, that she does not want to speak her father's words but her own: "I realised that ... sometimes it's better to tell your own story. I started writing my own speeches and changing the way I delivered them, from my heart rather than from a sheet of paper" (64). Thus, Yousafzai resists the societal constructs and does not want to blindly follow her father's opinions but form her own, and step into the public sphere on her own terms, giving voice to her own message and story.

Women's inferior position was justified with religion. All the rules that restrict women's lives and force them to stay out of the public sphere and be passive, were presented to the women as rules given by Allah in the Quran. However, few people in Swat could actually read Arabic, so they were dependent on others to read and interpret the Quran for them (92). Consequentially they took all these interpretations as the truth and applied them into their own lives. As a consequence of the conservative culture in Swat, most girls do not go to school and almost all the older women, like Yousafzai's mother, are illiterate. Depriving women of education is one of the most effective ways men can control women and this has been a popular strategy throughout history across different societies. In effect illiteracy makes most women dependent on men in every aspect of their lives, because they do not have any knowledge, they cannot contest the rules placed on them. In Swat, women are made to believe that the Quran contains rules of how women should act. Thus, if women do not adhere to the society's rules, they are committing blasphemy. For example, Yousafzai describes how her mother "believed it was written in the Quran that women should not go out and women should not talk to men other than relatives they cannot marry" (96). Because she is illiterate, she believes other's interpretations of the Quran and due to her being very religious, she wants to obey the rules because she does not want to sin. This contributes further to the power-relationship

between men and women, because most of the women in Swat are very religious, they want to obey Allah and thus they must obey the men. A good example of this phenomenon is the Taliban leader Fazlullah's rise to power. He exploited people's ignorance in order to gain power (92). Yousafzai accounts how "In the beginning Fazlullah was very wise. He introduced himself as an Islamic reformer and an interpreter of the Quran" (92). His radio broadcasts' target audience was women and he told them to stay indoors based on religion (95). Fazlullah was able to brainwash most of the locals by utilizing the people's religious piety and many began applying his rules to their daily lives.

However, more educated citizens can interpret the Quran more independently. Yousafzai values education very highly, especially because it gives people knowledge to interpret the Quran by themselves. This is a crucial aspect of how women gain independence from men, because they do no longer have to rely on them regarding religion. This is evident when Yousafzai is not affected by Fazlullah's brainwashing. She applies what she's learned in her "Islamic studies class at school" to what Fazlullah preaches and remarks that "[i]n the Holy Quran it is not written that men should go outside and women should work all day in the home" (Yousafzai 95). Instead her illiterate mother is once again unperceptive of the broadcasts' underlying messages, like women needing to stay at home and being veiled, and according to Yousafzai she "enjoyed these stories" (95).

When there was an earthquake in Swat, activists from the TNSM, "a movement for the enforcement of the Islamic law" (Yousafzai 268-269) said "it was caused by women's freedom and obscenity. If we did not mend our ways ... more severe punishment would come" (Yousafzai 88). The activists tried to influence the women who had not lived by their rules, so that they could gain power over them as well. Thus, even natural disasters were used to uphold the control of women. Yousafzai notes that the "[MMA activists] wanted to remove all traces of womankind from public life" (80). MMA was "a group of five religious parties" (79).

In addition to natural disasters, the women were blamed for Fazlullah's rise to power. Yousafzai describes Fazlullah's cleverness in seducing the people of Swat by utilizing religion. (92)

When he began using more extreme measures, that most people would not have agreed with at first, he had already won most of them over. Yousafzai accounts how the Taliban began killing policemen, political activists and women who did not abide by their rules. Several people withdrew their support from Fazlullah because of these developments. (98, 124) At the beginning of Fazlullah's rise to power "lots of women were so moved by [him] that they gave him gold and money, particularly in poor villages or households where the husbands were working abroad" (Yousafzai 96). Yousafzai accounts the story of one of these women, how the husband came back and when the Taliban caused an "explosion in their village [she] cried. 'Don't cry', said her husband. 'That is the sound of your earrings and nose studs. Now listen to the sound of your lockets and bangles'" (125). Thus, when the men who had supported Fazlullah in the beginning no longer agreed with his actions, they blamed the women for events that Fazlullah and the Taliban caused. This is another aspect of the societal constructs of the culture; when a man like Fazlullah does something bad it is not his fault, but the village men find fault in women instead. Additionally, the support the men gave to Fazlullah is not to blame for his actions, but the women's support is. These societal structures affect the women's identity because they are blamed for everything that the men do wrong, or even natural disasters that no one has control over. This is a way to uphold the men's superiority and justify why they should control the women.

However, the Taliban did allow some women to disregard the restrictions they placed on them. Yousafzai mentions "the Burqa Brigade – young women and girls ... in burqas with sticks, attacking CD and DVD shops ... [and] kidnapp[ing] women they said were prostitutes". Some of the women were even training to become suicide bombers. (104-105) Yousafzai explained why the Taliban approved of these women's public role: "When it suits the Taliban, women can be vocal and visible" (105). These women were essentially sacrificing themselves for the men's society and values. This way Yousafzai shows that the Taliban only allowed women to be seen, disregarding purdah, and to enter the public sphere when they were promoting the men's propaganda and fighting for their

cause. These women even supported men over other women; kidnapping women believed to be prostitutes. This way the Taliban could make women turn against other women, and even use women to degrade their own station in society for the Taliban. If the women were fighting each other, they could not band together and fight for equality and their own rights, which would be a threat to the Taliban.

Another aspect of gender identity affected by the societal constructs is female sexuality. Yousafzai describes how purdah affects female sexuality: “In our society for a girl to flirt with any man brings shame on the family, though it’s all right for the man” (54). She mentions a girl who flirted with a boy and was poisoned by her own family (54). These events in Yousafzai’s society held an underlying message to the women of female sexuality being something dangerous and sinful. Women should hide their desires and attractions, but men could show them openly and not be considered blasphemous.

According to a Taliban representative “A girl is so sacred she should be in purdah” (Yousafzai 77). Purdah implied that women should not interact with men who were not their relatives. Yousafzai describes the lengths to which men will go to in order to keep the two sexes separate. When Swat is evacuated due to Taliban violence and the people from neighbouring towns took the refugees into their homes “in order to protect women’s purdah, men ... even slept away from their homes” (Yousafzai 150). The women are seen as something pure and easily corrupted, in the society they avoid any occasion where women could mix with men they could potentially marry. This connects to a fear of their sexuality and the women forming an idea of relationships with men as improper. If they want to marry, they must wait for the man to step forward and hope for their father’s approval, because a woman cannot initiate any kind of relationship with a man, due to the societal constructs. (16-17)

Yousafzai accounts that “the burqa is not part of [the] Pashtun tradition” (142). She loved it when she was a child “but when you are made to wear it, that’s a different matter” (131). The concealment of women can have many effects on female sexuality, they want to cover their bodies

and might even think that to show their face, let alone their body, is shameful and sinful. This way the society influences the women's minds and most of them associate their sexuality with shame.

Even though Yousafzai resists these ideas, she is also influenced by them, as we see in her account of how she came to Britain. She was shocked at how the women dressed and interacted with men: "you could see men and women chatting and mixing in a way that would be unthinkable in Swat ... At nights our eyes were all out on stalks at the skimpy clothes that women wore – tiny shorts almost like knickers and bare legs ... My mother was so horrified that she cried, ... 'Please take me to Dubai. I can't live here!'" (253) Yousafzai also remembers how she was shown a movie at the hospital that the personnel thought she might find appealing. "I was shocked when the girls took off their shirts to practise in sports bras and I made the nurses switch it off" (242). This way it is evident that the societal norms of Swat have influenced Yousafzai's view of female sexuality. She does not want to watch a movie because she thinks the women in it dress inappropriately. Even though she chooses not to wear the burqa, she still willingly follows other rules of how women should dress that have been implemented from the societal influences.

### **3.2 Subconscious effects on gender identity**

Even though Yousafzai acknowledges many ways in which the culture in Swat influences her own gender identity as well as the women around her, the societal constructs have some subconscious effects on her as well. In Yousafzai's culture it is traditional to respect and obey one's parents, and due to the patriarchal structures of her society, especially one's father and other male relatives. Yousafzai's adoration of her father is evident throughout her autobiography and her father is mentioned considerably often. The slogan for Yousafzai's autobiography is that it is her story that she wants to give voice to: "I am Malala and this is my story" (6). However, there is one whole chapter at the beginning of the book, called "My Father the Falcon" (Yousafzai 21) all about her father and his life. The book does not have a similar chapter about Yousafzai's mother. This shows

how Yousafzai views her father as an integral part of her own story, more important than her mother. Yousafzai sees her life as being influenced by her father, and him as a reason why she is the way she is. One of the main reasons why she has been able to be vocal and resist the Taliban is because her father is an advocate for women's rights and has not wanted to silence her or treated her as an inferior because she is a girl. Yousafzai recognizes that because of the cultural norms her father could have been an obstacle in the way of her stepping into the public sphere, had he supported the same values as the Taliban. Thus, she feels gratitude towards him for always being supportive of her.

Yousafzai is additionally influenced by her father's values and world views. At many points of her autobiography when she presents a political dilemma or a rule that says how women should act, she gives voice to her father's opinion on the matter and does not necessarily even mention her own opinion. "My father says that Pakistan has been cursed with more than its fair share of politicians who only think about money" (Yousafzai 61). There are multiple accounts like this throughout the book and this shows how Yousafzai is subconsciously influenced to often view her father's opinions and values above her own. She rarely disagrees with her father and often asks for his opinion on matters she finds difficult to grasp. She does not point out or ask about her mother's values in the same multitude. She mentions her mother being illiterate and this is one of the reasons Yousafzai values her own education so highly, she does not want to end up illiterate like her.

Yousafzai values her father so highly that she even mentions "In my experience, if my father couldn't help with matters like these, there was only one option. I wrote a letter to God" (72). This illustrates how she thinks of her father as second only to God. This type of adoration of one's father and association with God is an aspect of Yousafzai's culture that she has implemented into her life. Thus, the societal constructs affect her in subconscious ways. Because of this adoration, she is distraught if she ever disappoints her father. When she stole something during her childhood, she begged her mother not to tell her father "I couldn't bear for him to be disappointed in me" (57). However, Yousafzai does not account feeling as terrible for disappointing her mother. All these



accounts in her autobiography show how Yousafzai is still heavily influenced by the societal constructs of her culture, because she yearns for her father's approval and values him more than her mother. When she prays at night, she asks God to bless "[f]irst our father and family" (Yousafzai 199). Yousafzai thinks of her father as the head of the family and its most important person. Her mother is only part of the rest of the family. She does not mention that her respect and adoration are due to him being a man, but the societal norm of her culture is for women to respect and obey men, and she does abide by this rule when it comes to her father. Additionally she defines herself and her opinions and values very much in terms of her father, and this shows how even when she wants to step into the public sphere and voice her own opinions and her own story, she still does it in part because of her father and by giving a voice to a man in her life as well as herself. She gives so much credit to her father that she seems to diminish the importance of her own accomplishments, even though she resisted and fought for her beliefs against the Taliban and her society in her own right.

### **3.3 Resistance**

Even though Yousafzai's gender identity is influenced by the societal constructs of her village, she does not conform to the society's traditional idea of womanhood. Elizabeth Oldfield discusses the concept of normative femininity in connection to African women in her book *Transgressing Boundaries : Gender, Identity, Culture, and the 'Other' in Postcolonial Women's Narratives in East Africa*. Normative femininity relates to Yousafzai as well, because the concept means "the social construction of the normative ... woman" and "'normal' ... female behaviour" (Oldfield 13). Thus, normative femininity in Yousafzai's society means very similar things as it does in the societies Oldfield studies. The "'normal' female behaviour" (13) in Swat is for women to be in purdah; confined to the private sphere and adhering to all the rules placed on them by the society. Thus, they form their own identity and the idea of a normal woman in relation to this societal construction. This causes a causal connection because as long as women accept normative femininity as part of their identity, they enable men's superiority. Oldfield explains the consequences of normative femininity:

“Patriarchal power, privilege and ability to exploit women depend on women’s willingness to conform to the social construction of normative femininity. The hierarchical positioning of the ... male in society thus crucially entails women’s acceptance and compliance with normative femininity, its associated subordination, and its subsequent privileging of the male” (15).

The most important aspect of Yousafzai’s resistance is how she publicly challenges the ideals of normative femininity in her society and shows that being a Pakistani, Muslim woman does not have to entail inferiority or silence. According to Oldfield:

Women who transgress boundaries by openly refusing to conform to the construction of ... normative femininity reject patriarchy and fundamentally disrupt its control over women. In the expressive realm of narrative, the female storyteller, precisely through the ... act of storytelling, can subvert, challenge and disrupt the construct of normative femininity. (16)

One example of Yousafzai’s resistance in the role of a storyteller, besides her autobiography, is when she wants to rewrite a *tapa*. “*Tapey* are centuries-old collected wisdom of our society; you don’t change them” (Yousafzai 249-250). The original *tapa* was “If the men cannot win the battle, O my country, Then the women will come forth and win you an honour” (250). Yousafzai “wanted to change it to: Whether the men are winning or losing the battle, O my country, The women are coming and the women will win you an honour” (250). Yousafzai’s rewrite conveys the message that women’s actions are not dependent on men. These kinds of acts of resistance pave the way for the disruption of normative femininity and challenging the societal constructs.

Yousafzai becomes an enemy of the Taliban because of her resistance and ultimately, they threaten her with violence if she does not start conforming to the societal constructs. The threat of violence is a way of gaining power; the men hold power over women because of this threat. Women who do not accept the societal norms are whipped or murdered. However, Yousafzai’s response to this threat is an act of resistance; when she receives a death threat from the Taliban it does not stop her: “It seemed to me that everyone knows they will die one day. My feeling was that nobody can

stop death; it doesn't matter if it comes from a *talib* or cancer. So I should do whatever I want to do" (188). When her father asks her to stop campaigning, she refuses despite the threat. Even after the Taliban shot her, she does not have any hatred towards her shooter; "My only regret was that I didn't have a chance to speak to them before they shot me" (237) "I would have explained to them why they should let us girls go to school" (203). Thus, Yousafzai refuses to be a victim, another passive attribute traditionally associated with women, and maintains her own agency by only seeing the incident as an obstacle she overcame, while fighting for her cause.

Leigh Gilmore and Elizabeth Marshall discuss how victimhood is traditionally associated with girlhood and how by refusing this role is an important act of resistance:

It often seems that girlhood has congealed into a single sad story in which imperiled girls await rescue, with limited hope or success. In this story, girls appear in perpetual crisis and permanently vulnerable not only because of dire circumstances but also because of something intransigent and intrinsic to girlhood itself ... How women of color use autobiography to talk back to the construction of the permanently vulnerable girl is an important and yet undertheorized area of feminist resistance ... women employ the genre of autobiography- the act of narrating a woman's life from girlhood to adulthood- to argue that political and moral autonomy develops from their responses to girlhood experience and crisis. (1-2)

Thus, Yousafzai's response to the tragedy is in effect more important than the shooting itself. The fact that she does not stop campaigning and only gets more vocal in her fight for education is an important part of her resistance. As she mentions in her autobiography, the Taliban achieved the opposite of their goal when they shot her. They wanted to silence her forever but instead she gained a considerably more public voice because of their actions. (243) Additionally, when Yousafzai decided to write an autobiography of her life, she was able to explain to her readers, who might have only heard about the famous shooting, that she is not a victim, but a young girl with a political agenda that she fights for and with an agency of her own.

Yousafzai's decision to write an autobiography of her life is a powerful act of resistance in itself. Historically autobiography has been a genre with male-dominated canon and women who have chosen to write autobiographies have had to "[enter] a tradition dominated by male models of development and, more critically, patriarchal standards of self-evaluation" (Dibattista). Yousafzai, being a young woman of colour and an autobiographer contradicts the traditional view of autobiographers being old white men. Additionally, she resists the traditional role of a woman in her society by writing an autobiography, because the main idea of purdah is to keep women silent and out of sight and the public sphere. With her autobiography Yousafzai shows everyone that she has a powerful public voice and she will not be a passive victim but a woman with an agency that she uses to speak for women's rights and education.

## 4. Conclusion

Yousafzai's autobiography shows how complex societal constructs can be. People are inevitably influenced and formed by the culture they grow up in. They form their idea of what it is to be a woman, through observing other women and men near them. Ultimately, Yousafzai's community's norms and values, as well as her family and friend's values affect the way she forms her own values and gender identity. However, she can resist these values by the power given to her through education, because it gives her the knowledge to question beliefs and values and individually form her own.

Autobiography is a text that makes the observing of these outside influences and the forming of one's identity more effortless, because it makes Yousafzai's thought-processes visible throughout her childhood, while gender identity is formed. However, there will still be further development because the forming of gender identity is a continuing process throughout one's life. Due to this, it would be interesting to study, for instance how living in a British society might change her gender identity during adulthood, as the book does not cover her whole life experience.

All in all, Yousafzai uses the genre of autobiography as a tool of resistance, this way her resistance is not only visible to the people in her village, but it is made public. In addition to resisting the Taliban, she resists the male-dominated literary canon. Further, she makes the conventions that enable gender inequality in her village visible, and consequently her readers can learn to question how these kinds of constructs may influence their gender identities as well. Additionally, she uses the convention of autobiography to give voice to her campaign for education and women's rights, and that is how the autobiography enables her continuing resistance.

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